

PRIVATE ARCHIVES AND THEIR PROBLEMS : SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE RECORD OF BHOPAL (MADHYA PRADESH)

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Man has got an inborn desire to perpetuate memories of his past. He wants to have some link with the happenings and the events of his past life and hence preserves things which give him some nostalgic feeling when he broods over the days gone by. But to properly and methodically preserve the records is a technical job and most of the records thus preserved get destroyed due to careless handling and lack of technical knowledge. That is where, the expert steps in.

The records of the ordinary human beings are of no importance to the historians. Only those who make a mark in their lives attract the attention of the society and come under the ambit of history. Records of such personalities are maintained and preserved by the governments. However, some records are privately owned and maintained which consist of *sanads*, *farmans*, lease deeds, diaries, letters, memoranda, manuscript, photographs and paintings; through which events of the past could be gleaned and re-constructed. These are of immense importance to the historians. However, the proper maintenance and preservation of such records seems to be an uphill task especially in a country, where inclement seasons, ravaged by insects and vermin, lack of space and absence of technical know-how come in the way of well-meaning individuals and many an important documents get destroyed.

Keeping in view the above, a modest attempt has been made in this paper to identify private archival records available in Bhopal with some individuals and institutions. The following institutions possess records of importance for historians :—

1. Bhopal University, M.A.C.T., Medical College, other affiliated colleges of the University and some local schools.
2. Banks and other Business houses of Bhopal.
3. Political parties.
4. Newspapers and Printing Presses of Bhopal.
5. Sports bodies, like the Bhopal Hockey Association and other Literary bodies.
6. Bhopal Wakf Board and other local trusts.

Out of the above institutions some are scrupulously maintaining their old records and it will not be amiss to mention here that the local Sultaniana Girls School (the oldest school of Bhopal) has got registers pertaining to the year 1868 :

Apart from the above-mentioned institutions the following individual records are also of importance :—

1. Late Raja Awadh Narain, Ex.-P.M. of Bhopal State.
2. Shri Chatur Narain Malaviya, Ex.-P.M. of Bhopal State and Ex.-M.P.

3. Babu Kamta Prasad, Ex-Minister, Bhopal.
4. Shri Syed Zahoor Hashmi, Ex-Minister, Bhopal State.
5. Late Khan Shakir Ali Khan, M.L.A. and Communist Leader.
6. Late Maulana Tarzi Mashriqi, Ex-Minister, M.P. and a veteran Congress Leader.
7. Lala Mulk Raj, Ex-Minister, Bhopal State.
8. H. H. Shah Bano Sahiba, Dowager Begum of Bhopal.
9. H. H. Sajida Sultan, daughter of Nawab Hameedullah Khan of Bhopal.
10. Shri Mamnoon Hasan Khan, Ex-Labour Commissioner.

Quantum of Records

I have interviewed most of the above persons to determine the extent of records available with them. While important records pertaining to the people's movement in Bhopal in pre-independent India is preserved by the persons at serial nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 above; some interesting letters of Dr. Mohd. Iqbal are in the possession of Shri Mamnoon Hasan Khan.

Pandit Chatur Narain Malaviya (70), who was Prime Minister of Bhopal State in 1947 and was later on elected to the Lok Sabha, had been an important political figure of Bhopal. He has got a considerable number of documents which ought to be identified, catalogued and preserved for the historians. He used to write his diary regularly and wrote day to day happenings and comments on different political and social events from 1934 onwards in 20 and odd diaries, many of which are now moth-eaten. These diaries are written in English and Hindi. Besides these, he is in possession of six letters written to him by Nawab Hamidullah Khan, whose P. M. he was: a letter written by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and five letters written by Rameshwari Nehru, besides many memoranda and some important files. His records need immediate attention from the archivists because he is an old gentleman keeping indifferent health and is likely to move from the present spacious house and will have a problem of space. However, he has no objection if his records are either taken over or photographed by the authorities.

The following items of records are available with Babu Kamta Prasad (66), who had a chequered political career, rising to be the Minister of Finance in the first popular ministry headed by Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma after the merger of the state and Bhopal being declared a Part "C" state :—

Notes and memoranda pertaining to his regime as minister. Four letters written to him by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Some letters of Dr. Rajendra Prasad and other Central Ministers.

Babu Kamta Prasad has also agreed to hand over the above records and has also given his consent for their photo-copying.

Problems faced by the persons in possession of important records

After ascertaining the extent of records, let us examine the various problems faced by the individual and institutions in their preservation. The first problem is of determining the importance of these records and of weeding out of less important or un-important records. This is essential since no

institution could hold all of its records in perpetuity. For instance, Bhopal University preserves the answer-books of the examinees for a period of five years only.

Secondly, almost all the persons interviewed by me admitted of destroying certain letters and other papers after preserving them for some years. This is, in truth, a psychological problem, born out of the changing moods of a person, who sometimes feels the futility of preserving certain papers.

Thirdly, some of the papers being of a very private nature could not be shown to others and are either likely to be destroyed by the owner or may come to light only after the demise of the owner. While some papers having some damaging reflections on the political character of the owner are bound to be suppressed by him.

Fourthly, many a time, other members of the family are not as interested in the records as the owner himself and not realising their true significance or being ignorant of the languages in which such papers are written, might destroy them.

Finally, the problem of lack of space and proper and methodical maintenance of such papers against the ravages of weather, insects and vermin, is found to be a common problem to all the holders of such records.

Suggestions

1. A district-wise or Tehsil-wise list of important persons owning records of archival interests may be prepared and periodical meetings of such persons and the experts may be held to instruct them in the methods of preservation, cataloguing and indexing of their records. Their consent to hand over some of their records may also be obtained in such meetings. They may also be requested to consult the experts before intending to destroy any document in their possession. If these persons want to keep some of the papers as family heirlooms, arrangements for their photo-copying or microfilming may be made.

2. Institutions may be requested to maintain their records properly and technical guidance may be provided to them. They should be asked to open archival rooms or cells for the preservation of important documents.

3. A committee of experts may be formed either at district or tehsil level to approach individuals and institutions for examining their records and advising them on proper weeding out operations.

4. If possible, racks and other material may be supplied to the needy individuals.

5. Training in the maintenance of records may be imparted in short-term courses to desirous individuals and delegates of institutions.

6. A district-wise index of important papers in the possession of individuals may be published.

I feel that records of state and national importance are in the possession of private persons and it is high time that sincere efforts be made towards identification and preservation of such papers for the posterity.